Efforts are also being made to harmonize standards and measurements of export products manufactured in the region to promote and protect intra-regional investments, to avoid double taxation and to harmonize customs procedures and regulations. Trade fairs are organized by the SAARC member countries to show case the trade potential of the member countries. The last SAARC Trade Fair was held in Kathmandu in October, 2002. The next SAARC Trade Fair is scheduled to be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in December, 2003. Steps are also being taken to improve the infrastructure facilities and the land customs stations on the borders, especially with Bangladesh and Nepal. To facilitate movement of officials handling trade matters and the trading community within the SAARC region, the SAARC VISA Exemption Schemes has been in operation. The Scheme incorporates an agreed list of entitled persons who are issued the SAARC VISA in their respective countries of citizenship.

Protection for traditional Indian medicines

16. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state the action taken to strengthen the work already initiated in the TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property) to save traditional Indian medicines in the global consumers market in view of the extensive public health and safety risks posed by the counterfeit medicines?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE): The TRIPS Agreement lays down minimum standards of protection of intellectual property rights which WTO Member countries are obliged to implement in their law. The TRIPS Agreement does not deal with the issue of counterfeit medicines from the public health and the safety risk perspective.

India along with a number of bio-diversity rich developing countries has made a proposal in the WTO for prevention of bio-piracy and to ensure a mutually supportive relationship between the TRIPS Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity. India has proposed that "the TRIPS Agreement should be amended in order to provide that Members shall require that an applicant for a patent relating to biological materials

or to traditional knowledge shall provide, as a condition to acquiring patent rights:

(i) disclosure of the source and country of origin of the biological resource and of the traditional knowledge used in the invention;

(ii) evidence of prior informed consent through approval of authorities under the relevant national regimes; and

(iii) evidence of fair and equitable benefit sharing under the national regime of the country of origin."

Growth of exports

17. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Associated Chambers of Commerce has undertaken a study on growth in exports;

(b) if so, the salient features thereof;

(c) whether highest exports was to Asia and Oceania followed by North America, South America and Western European countries during 2001-2002 and 2002-2003; and

(d) the measures suggested to pick up exports to Africa and other regions, where decline in export has been reported?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Yes Sir. The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India had carried out a study titled, "Analysis of India's Export Growth Performance", in May, 2003 for the period April-November, 2002-03 as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. The salient features of the study are as follows:

1. Exports Growth to Asia & Oceania has been the highest followed by North America, Latin America, and Western Europe.
2. Exports to developing countries have increased more relative to developed/advanced economies.
3. There has been a surge in exports to Asian countries.